

Thersites

My pun(n)y friend Thersites was chatting with Aristophanes the other day and asking him how he got into the comic business in the first place: after all, he began pretty young, didn't he? Aristophanes agreed, and ascribed his early successes – winner in three out of his first four productions, when he was scarcely out of his teens – to his youthful training on the Academy mag. He well remembered cutting his comic teeth on a soap opera about Ajax (full of vim) and a soap opera about Hercules, before he moved onto a full-blown parody of a tragic family, entitled 'Gaytones' (n.b. get a Greek student to explain the 'joke').

This harrowing tale began with Ham Artier and his wife Khatta Strophe (whom he always called 'my missus'). They had rather a naughty baby called Bris ('Hi, Bris', his mother would proudly say), who Ate constantly and grew up to be great friends with his dumb chum next door, Khofon Prosopon. When Bris grew up, his Auntie Strophe took him to school, where he suffered to some extent from the cutting one-liners of his teacher, old 'Sticky' Mytheagh, but still managed to come away with excellent reports from the sympathetic headmaster Horatio O'Bleaquar, if not from the chaplain Horatio (Rector).

One day, tragedy struck. Auntie Strophe was taking him home from school when the naughty child ran off. The distraught woman, popoi-ed with grief, searched oi and low, and had just reached the bank of the river, hoping that young Bris was hiding there for fun, when she heard a terrible cry. To her amazement, it was the dumb child Khofon Prosopon, shouting and gesticulating wildly by the bridge. 'What is it?', she cried fearfully, when the old family friend Anna Gnorisis appeared on the scene. 'Good heavens,' Anna cried, 'I recognise that child in the river! It's Bris!'. Horrors! What was she to do ? Luckily, Anna's walking companion May Canny was a tall, mobile woman, and she at once swung into action, plunging into the torrent. When the handsome young boy-next-door Perry Pateer joined her, the child, and the day, were saved. The good news of the rescue was reported to the parents by the rather crotchety old next-door neighbour Mrs M. Angelos, and when the child finally returned home (having been cleaned up a bit by kind old Cath Arsis at the chemists) they were able to celebrate a double triumph: the salvation of the child and the return of Khofon's voice. As old Pa Rody said at the end of the party, 'There are many unexpected things in life which *do* happen, and many expected which *don't*, but for sheer unadulterated tripe it's hard to beat a Greek tragedy, what?'.

Piling on the agony

This minor masterpiece, Aristophanes recalls, was not widely appreciated, so he volunteered to do the ads. and start an agony column (thus becoming the prot-agonist),

adopting the form and voice of Procrustes. 'You think some of my current jokes are bad, huh?' he said. 'Just catch some of these, my old Homeric hunchback':

Dear Procrustes, Now I have completed the Penelopesian War, can you suggest a place I can go away to recuperate?

Yours, Odysseus.

Do you have a preference? Red Sea? Black Sea? Or any Odyssey? Ino. Eumaeus well homer in for some fishing on the Scylla Isles, or some spine-chilling deep-sea diving in the Charybdean (nothing Scheria than that!). Or try some sea-surfing with Cir(f)ce. And here's a hint if you get sea-sick: use the new wonder-pills NAUSICAA – they make you neither iller nor sicker quicker. Perhaps you should try a keep-fit holiday, if you are a fattie rather than Athene: how about some long-distance cycloping? On the other hand, you could take advantage of the cheap Awhades on the underground, with river trips by 'Charon for you' services thrown in. If you want to rent-a-car, Lotus ithaca for you! But no furious driving, please: you may get orrested.

Dear Procrustes, I keep trying to get through to Hades to check up on underworld conditions there at this moment in time, but the phones here on Chios are so awful I can never get through. What shall I do? Homer.

Simple. Go to another chios and have another troy. Put two coins into demeter (in case it styx) and wait for a ceres of pips. Then ask for the persephone. You should get through, dis way.

Dear Procrustes, My very good friend Jason seems to be itching all over these days. What can be the matter with him?

Medea.

M'dear, don't worry. He's probably got the golden fleas. Tell him to keep away from the argonits.

Dear Procrustes, Yesterday I picked up a very cheap unfulfilled conditional sentence. but when I got it home, I found that it had no an in the main clause. Can you suggest a reliable firm to fit one, cheap? H. Botting.

Of course. There are plenty of an-tique dealers who work under approved conditions. I recommend S Hood and Wood Ltd.

Dear Procrustes, Can you recommend a good read for my soccer-mad son? Apollo (the far-shooter).

Skippy Owe's 'African World Cup' reconsiders many old controversies (was it a Hannibal? Should it have been a poenalty?). Julio Cesare's 'My fifty greatest gauls' is also quite a triumph, particularly the account of the famous 'iding he received in March 44BC.

Thersites was forced to agree that this was pretty terrible stuff, but still felt justified in asking Aristophanes' permission to present it to the country's most exquisitely discerning audience. What, after all, is scholarship for, if not to confront the unthinkable?